

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT



**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WRAC RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP**

District Headquarters, 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33406
Monday, March 17, 2014, 5:00 PM

WRAC RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP MINUTES

ITEM 1 - WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS – Newton Cook, WRAC Recreation Issues Chair

- Mr. Cook introduced himself and welcomed attendees.

ITEM 2 - RECREATION DISCUSSION, UPDATES, FUTURE MEETING TOPICS:

- Future presentations requested included;
 - Recreation on lands permitted by USACE/FDEP as mitigation areas (C139 Annex).
 - Motorized vessel use on DuPuis Wildlife Management Area.
 - Airboat use in Bluff Hammock/Kissimmee River Public Use Area

Attendees expressed the following concerns or made the following announcements:

- Attendee asked about the status of ENP and the airboat concessions along the south side of Tamiami Trail. Staff will follow-up on this request.
- Wes Seitz from FWC invited all to attend the STA Waterfowl Season Post-hunt stakeholder meeting being held at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Regional headquarters on March 24, 2014.
- Concerns were raised about possible illegal hunting activities taking place along the C-18/Corbett levee. Staff direction was to raise the issue with FWC.
- Attendees asked if the forty acres of private land along the C-18 will be opened back up to the public. Attendees were advised that the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners approved County staff to pursue purchase of the property.
- Participants discussed the removal of pine trees from District property in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and staff reported that pine underbrush and some small saplings were being thinned to allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor in order to encourage more ground cover and to restore the area to a more natural state. Additional comments were made concerning cutting down trees and leaving them on the ground which may cause a fire hazard. Staff responded that there was no market for the timber and the fallen trees will quickly rot or be consumed during the next prescribed burn..
- A question was raised regarding a 7.3 acre piece of land adjacent to Hickory Hammock, Kissimmee River PUA where hunting activities have occurred in the past and now the area has been fenced and posted with no trespassing signs. Staff will look into the situation and follow-up with the individual who raised the concern.

- The Florida Trail Association thanked DuPuis staff for assisting a distressed hiker on the property.

ITEM 3 – C-139 Annex Restoration Project Overview:

- Terrie Bates, Director, Water Resources Division, SFWMD provided an update on the restoration activities taking place on the C-139 annex (Sam Jones/Abiaki Prairie).
 - Attendees would like to see that recreation access included in the design principles of the project. The hope is that staff will consider multiple recreation possibilities during the early planning phase.
 - Participants questioned opening access for small game hunting during restoration. Staff responded that it was too early in the process but could be considered in the future.
 - Questions were raised regarding the funding coming in from the Lake Belt Mitigation Committee and if it could be used on other projects. Staff replied that funds would be used to cover “up-front” costs associated with the project. Funds coming in after the project is complete would be reimbursement for land acquisition previously spent on the project and the Governing Board would make policy decisions on where this funding could be used.
 - Discussion continued regarding cultural resources and the efforts to preserve those areas. Participants suggested that the site provide some interpretation of the resources..
 - Staff reiterated that this is a mitigation project subject to agency permitting.
 - It was requested that the Corps/DEP permitting allow recreation to be a component of the project.

ITEM 4 – Leasing Process Overview:

- Ray Palmer, Section Leader, Real Estate Department, Field Operations and Land Management Division, SFWMD provided an overview of the interim leasing process for agricultural use on District property.
 - Attendees questioned the bidding process and the 10% above highest bid clause for current tenant. Staff responded that current lessees must participate in the bidding process and must bid the minimum according to the property appraisal and cannot wait until the process is over and offer 10% above the highest bid.
 - Participants questioned what the District considers market value of cattle versus citrus. Staff explained that due to the length of some leases and market fluctuations, values may differ. Further discussion was held concerning the condition of citrus groves and the restricted ability to use chemicals to enhance trees located on District property, which also factors in to the cost of leasing.
 - Attendees questioned whether the leases in St. Lucie County were water farming leases. Staff clarified that these are currently grazing leases but in the future would be used for some form of dispersed water storage due to the infrastructure which includes swales, ditches and canals already located there.
 - A discussion took place regarding the possible opportunity to develop new baseline Best Management Practices (BMPs) on leased properties. Staff explained the different types of BMPs associated with different land uses and the additional restrictions beyond standard BMPs set in place by the District.

- Concerns were raised regarding lessees being able to sublease to certain hunters and restrict access to members of the public. Staff assured attendees that lands open for public access could not be sublet by lessees.
- Participants asked how the District was able to determine whether a lessee was a “good tenant.” Staff explained this was determined through the District’s inspection and monitoring program on District leased property.

ITEM 5- Exotic Ficus Tree Removal and Native Tree Replacement at DuPuis Management Area, SFWMD:

- Dr. David Black, Environmental Analyst and Bert Trammell, Section Leader, Field Operations and Land Management Division, SFWMD, provided a presentation on invasive ficus trees located in the DuPuis Wildlife Management Area Equestrian Campground. The presentation included an explanation that the exotic Laurel Fig located within the campground is spreading into other areas of the property and the cost effectiveness of addressing the problem now.
 - Members expressed many concerns and suggestions regarding removal of specific ficus trees in Dupuis. Concerns included:
 - Cost of removal
 - Losing shade for horses and hikers
 - Phased replacement of trees and what species would be used to replace them
 - Growth of these trees seems slow and the spread is not that fast, why should treatment be so aggressive.
 - Participants suggested that staff look into a chemical treatment being used in urban areas that will kill the wasps that help the tree to germinate so that the trees can be saved and the necessity for removing the trees can be eliminated. Staff is looking into the wasp treatment along with the other suggestions brought up by attendees.

ITEM 6- Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Region Overview, SFWMD:

- Joe Bozzo, Senior Scientist, SFWMD, provided a presentation on managing land on the District’s CREW Management Area n including the challenges associated with managing natural areas adjacent to urban communities.
 - Attendees asked why there were only six permits allotted for horses at a time on this property. Staff suggested that limitations are due to the trail availability and ecological concerns but will review the number of permits available for this activity..

ITEM 7 - Public Use Updates

- Dan Cotter, Section Leader, Land Stewardship Section, Field Operations and Land Management Division, SFWMD presented an update to Public Use activities on District property.
- The following updates were provided:
 - Project Reviews; A-1 and A-2 Flow Equalization Basins, BOMA/C-43 Water Quality Treatment and Testing Facility
 - Trail and Access Updates; Cypress Creek, Florida National Scenic Trail, Proposed Grant for DuPuis Trailhead, STA 5/6 Trail, Kissimmee River /Starvation Slough

- Hunting Area Updates and Proposed approval for small game hunting areas (C23/24, Rocky Glades) and proposed expansion to existing areas (Southern Glades, Lake Marion Creek)
- o Attendees expressed appreciation and support for the upgrade to the Gate 2 trailhead at DuPuis and asked if there would be an opportunity to have input to kiosk design and content to be placed in that location. Participants also stated their willingness to assist with the existing commemorative recognizing Fred Schiller, past District employee.
- o Attendees wanted to know if they would still be able to use the road located on the cattle lease property at Cypress Creek for maintenance access to the Loxahatchee River parcels. Staff informed the group that access will be available for volunteer projects.
- o A discussion took place regarding airboat signage in the Bluff Hammock-Kissimmee River area and moving sign-posts to accommodate better access. Airboaters would like for the District to look into providing better access to airboaters in light of current Kissimmee River restoration and other allowable uses.
- o Participants stated that citrus groves located near C-23/C-24 adjacent to the small game hunting area appears to be abandoned and may be an opportunity to increase the size of the hunting area if incorporated. Staff will look into it and provide a response.

Water Conservation Area 2 Clean-Up Update

BJ Kattel, Senior Planner, Land Stewardship Section, Field Operations and Land Management Division, SFWMD, provided the group an update on the volunteer clean-up project in WCA2 scheduled for April 26th. He informed everyone that he and key stakeholders visited the site and formulated a plan to remove debris from the site. Staff thanked the Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association and the airboating community for volunteering to help with this project.

Adjourn

Mr. Cook thanked everyone for coming and announced that the next WRAC Recreational Issues Workshop would be held on June 16, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:26 PM.